

DAILY BULLETIN

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UNITED STATES WILL WORK WITH NEW U.N. HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

U.S. official encourages member countries to work with
existing institutions 1

NATIONS TO REVIEW CURBS ON ILLICIT SMALL ARMS TRAFFICKING

Effective export/import controls, stockpile security help
curb trade, U.S. says 2

FOREIGN SCIENTISTS IN U.S. LEARN BIRD FLU TESTING TECHNIQUES

Program seeks to improve animal health care
infrastructure..... 3

U.S. NAVY SHIP MERCY CONTINUES AID MISSION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

After visit to Philippines, Mercy heading to Indonesia,
Bangladesh, East Timor 5

UNITED STATES WILL WORK WITH NEW U.N. HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

U.S. official encourages member countries to
work with existing institutions

By Michelle Austein
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States is committed to protecting human rights and will work with the new U.N. Human Rights Council to advance its causes, Ambassador Warren W. Tichenor told the council June 21.

"The Human Rights Council gives us all an opportunity to make a positive change in the world for people who are oppressed and are denied freedom," said Tichenor, the U.S. representative to the U.N. in Geneva.

The council is holding its first session from June 19 to June 30 in Geneva.

Forty-seven countries are members of the council. The United States elected not to join, citing concerns about criteria for membership not being strong enough to keep human rights abusers off the council.

The United States is committed to supporting the council, Tichenor said. "The United States wants this council to succeed and we will work hard to make that happen."

By cooperating with existing international institutions, the council can help build human rights protections and promote the rule of law, Tichenor said.

The United States encourages the council to fight human rights abuses and to “speak for those patriots who have had their voices silenced,” Tichenor said. The ambassador cited the case of Burma’s democracy activist, Aung San Suu Kyi, who recently spent her 61st birthday under house arrest.

The full transcript of Tichenor’s speech is available at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in Geneva Web site: <http://geneva.usmission.gov/>

NATIONS TO REVIEW CURBS ON ILLICIT SMALL ARMS TRAFFICKING

Effective export/import controls, stockpile security help curb trade, U.S. says

By Judy Aita
Washington File UN Correspondent

United Nations -- Every two minutes worldwide someone is killed by an illegally traded rifle or other small weapon. These deaths occur not only in conflict-plagued nations, but are tied to organized crime, drug trafficking, suicides and gun accidents, and account for far more deaths than those generated by heavier combat weapons, according to the United Nations.

From June 26 to July 7, U.N. member nations and non-governmental organizations will gather to assess progress made in fighting and eliminating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons since a program of action to curb trafficking was adopted in 2001.

That plan focuses on practical solutions such as collecting and destroying illegal weapons, strengthening import and export controls, raising awareness of the effect of these weapons, improving security at weapons storage facilities and helping countries track down arms brokers and illegal arms transfers.

“First and foremost the conference is about eliminating illegal small arms in order to save more lives,” Ambassador Prasad Kariyawasam of Sri Lanka, who will chair

the Small Arms Review Conference, said in New York June 21.

“Small arms fuel conflicts and support activities of groups involved in organized crime and trafficking drugs and people,” Kariyawasam said. In the 1990s, some 47 of 49 major conflicts involved the use of small arms and light weapons, he said, and most of those conflicts “were exacerbated by the accessibility of illegally traded and trafficked small arms.”

U.S. Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Robert Joseph said in a statement released in Washington June 19 that the United States looks forward to working with others at the review conference “to tighten international arms export controls, stockpile security, and [national arms] brokering legislation while protecting the well-established rights of Americans to keep and bear arms.”

“It is in mankind’s interest to combat the global illicit trade in small arms and light weapons which exacerbates disputes and hinders post-conflict progress,” Joseph said.

During the two-week conference, the United States will work to strengthen the 2001 program of action (POA) by focusing on transfer controls and end-use certifications. The United States also will encourage the use of existing best practices developed by entities such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, as well as adherence to the U.N. International Tracing Instrument.

NO BAN ON LEGAL USE

Since the 2001 conference, more than 50 countries have strengthened national legislation to control trade in small arms and more than 60 countries have collected and destroyed large numbers of illegal small arms, the Sri Lankan ambassador said. Progress has been made, but much more needs to be done, he said.

“The conference,” Kariyawasam said, “offers an opportunity for all countries to review their pledges to get rid of illegal trade in small arms and, for this purpose, to develop a strategy for further implementation of the program of action agreed [to] in 2001.”

He emphasized that the conference will not attempt to ban the legal use of firearms, but only focus on illegal trade and trafficking. It will not be a forum for negotiating a treaty to prohibit citizens of any country from possessing firearms, or to interfere in legal trade in

small arms and light weapons, the ambassador said. Nor, he added, will the conference suggest any regulations against legal positions by nations.

The United States has one of the best records in marking and tracing weapons, effectively controlling defense imports and exports, regulating brokers, and managing stockpiles, the State Department says. The U.S. Justice Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives traced more than 10,000 firearms for law enforcement officials in more than 50 countries in 2005 alone. (See related article.)

Since 2001, the State Department has helped 25 countries destroy more than 900,000 illicit or surplus small arms or light weapons and more than 80 million pieces of excess or illicit ammunition. More than 18,600 man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS) in 18 countries have been destroyed since 2003, it says.

Small arms are weapons that can be carried and used by an individual and include handguns, pistols, rifles, submachine guns, mortars, grenades and light missiles. Light weapons may require more than one person for operation and include heavy machine guns, mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, anti-tank guns and portable launchers of anti-tank missiles.

The Small Arms Survey, a Geneva-based independent research project, has estimated that 1,000 people are killed every day by small arms and light weapons; of those deaths, an average 560 are criminal homicides, 250 are direct war deaths, 140 are suicides, while 50 are accidents or undetermined cases.

THE UNITED STATES CAN HELP OTHER NATIONS

The United States has worked hard since the last small arms review conference within multilateral forums and bilaterally to strengthen provisions of the U.N. "Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects (POA)."

"Many hundreds of thousands and possibly millions of excess, loosely secured, or otherwise at-risk small arms and light weapons have been destroyed" since the 2001 program was adopted, according to State Department official Steven Costner, "and many more have been secured."

"New legislation has been drafted in many capitals to

facilitate implementation of POA provisions," says Costner, "but there is clearly room for improvement and wider implementation in some states that have not yet demonstrated the full political will to do so."

Costner, who is deputy director of the State Department's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement, identified three areas where the United States can help other countries implement better control mechanisms:

- It can help states destroy surplus, obsolete or loosely secured stockpiles of small arms and light weapons and it can support such destruction bilaterally or in conjunction with other donors through regional organizations.
- It can provide governments with assessments, technical advice and orientation on how the United States secures and manages its stockpiles of such weapons and, in some cases, may recommend opportunities for financial assistance that other nations may draw on to enact similar programs.
- The United States is ready, through existing courses taught by law enforcement specialists, to provide advice and share its expertise on how it traces U.S.-origin firearms.

Costner said the United States supports the POA's call for "effective export and import controls, restraint in trade to regions of conflict, observance and enforcement of UNSC [United Nations Security Council] embargoes, strict regulation of arms brokers, transparency in exports, and improving security of arms stockpiles and destruction of excess [weapons and ammunition]."

FOREIGN SCIENTISTS IN U.S. LEARN BIRD FLU TESTING TECHNIQUES

Program seeks to improve animal health care infrastructure

By Charlene Porter
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington – Animal health specialists from countries as diverse as Argentina, Indonesia and Uganda have converged on a laboratory in the American heartland to learn how to detect a virus that might set off a global influenza pandemic.

In response to requests for technical training from other countries, the National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NSVL) of the U.S. Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service has been conducting training in diagnostic testing for highly pathogenic avian influenza.

“They get [training in] a whole battery of tests to diagnose avian influenza,” said Dr. Beth Lautner, director of the NVSL in Ames, Iowa.

The highly pathogenic avian influenza strain H5N1 has reached pandemic proportions among animals in several Asian countries and has appeared in wild or domestic bird populations in more than 50 countries.

Since its emergence in late 2003, more than 200 million domestic birds have died from the disease itself, or as a result of culling intended to limit the spread of the virus.

About 130 people have died from the disease, most after direct exposure to ailing birds. Health experts warn that the virus could mutate to become contagious among humans, leading to a pandemic of human influenza.

As the disease spread into more countries after its initial appearance in Southeast Asia, international concern mounted about the need to prevent human disease at its source in animal populations.

A meeting of donor nations in Beijing in January ended with pledges of almost \$2 billion, with much of that targeted to improving disease surveillance and control in animal populations.

THE TRAINING

Lautner, a veterinarian, says the animal health specialists coming to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) facility in Iowa have differing levels of experience and facilities in their countries.

“When they go back to their countries, they have to look at what equipment ... they have and what testing procedures fit best into the programs in their individual countries,” Lautner said in a telephone interview from NVSL.

The training focuses on virus isolation and production of that virus from a sample to be used in testing purposes, she added. They scientists also are trained in molecular diagnostic techniques that allow rapid testing of a sample.

“Having those skills are transferable to other agents as well,” said the NVSL veterinarian. While highly pathogenic avian influenza is the pathogen of concern now, animal health specialists might encounter a wide variety of diseases in real-world situations back home.

“We help them on [the question] ‘what else might it be if it’s not [avian influenza],’” Lautner said.

The NVSL training benefits not only the several dozen specialists who will pass through the Ames laboratories. Training participants return to their countries with instruction in how to pass their knowledge on and spread the techniques more widely among colleagues.

“This is part of helping to build veterinarian infrastructure in other countries,” Lautner said.

Building stronger veterinarian infrastructure throughout the world is part of the overall U.S. strategy against pandemic, according to the Foreign Agricultural Service of USDA, another agency partner in sponsoring the training.

“Our international efforts represent the frontline battle to safeguard agriculture and mitigate the risk of an influenza pandemic,” said Jocelyn Brown, assistant deputy administrator, at a June 20 Washington briefing.

GLOBAL HEALTH NETWORKS

Laboratory techniques are an important part of the training program, but professional exchange that occurs among these scientists is also important.

“We learn as well from the participants in the course,” Lautner said. “We see it as a two-way street.”

The specialists from different nations give the U.S. animal health experts new understanding of what is happening in animal populations in other countries. The training is also the basis for ongoing relationships and opens international dialogues among specialists. Such dialogues are part of a larger global movement to integrate better the disciplines of animal health and human health.

Growing recognition of the tendency for viruses to move among species has sparked greater interest in informational exchange between what have been largely separate spheres in health practice.

“We need to better understand what [all nations are] doing with regard to surveillance,” Lautner said, “and we need to understand what diagnostic techniques each of us is using.”

THE PARTICIPANTS

Animal health specialists participating in the June 19-23 workshop represent Argentina, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burma, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Lebanon, Libya, Mexico, Mozambique, Oman, Pakistan, Romania, Sudan, Taiwan, Uganda and Uruguay.

The first training session, held February 27-March 3, had 25 participants from Algeria, Armenia, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Georgia, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Morocco, Philippines, Romania, Senegal, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

The second session, held May 15-19, had 26 participants from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Cameroon, China, Ghana, India, Iraq, Kenya, Kuwait, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Nigeria, Philippines, Serbia-Montenegro, Singapore and Sri Lanka.

For additional information, see Bird Flu:
http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/bird_flu.html

U.S. NAVY SHIP MERCY CONTINUES AID MISSION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

After visit to Philippines, Mercy heading to Indonesia, Bangladesh, East Timor

By Cassie Duong
 Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The U.S. Navy ship (USNS) Mercy is continuing its five-month mission in Southeast Asia, traveling to Indonesia, Bangladesh and East Timor after rebuilding local facilities and providing medical aid and training in the Philippines.

“The crew of the USNS Mercy, along with its partners from civilian organizations and the Philippine Government and Armed Forces, were able to help thousands of

Filipinos get back on their feet, feel healthy, and get the medical treatment that they needed,” U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines Kristie A. Kenney said in a press release issued by the U.S. Embassy in Manila June 20.

“This ship’s visit was a powerful symbol of our two nations’ partnership to bring greater peace and prosperity to the country,” Kenney said. “I’m thrilled that the U.S. Government was able to partner with our Philippine friends in such a remarkable way.”

During their monthlong stay, the Mercy’s crew and its civilian partners helped residents of Manila, Zamboanga, Jolo and Tawi Tawi by providing medical services, dental assistance and participating in humanitarian projects, according to the embassy press release. Medical teams treated patients in the Mercy’s on-board facilities and at hospitals and medical centers in various port cities. In total, the Mercy’s crew and its partners interacted with more than 50,000 local residents, trained more than 700 local professionals and performed medical operations on more than 300 persons.

Personnel from the Naval Construction Force (Seabees) took part in 74 projects throughout the country, repairing buildings, installing electrical wiring and training local construction workers in building maintenance.

On June 9, the ship was visited by Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

The Mercy mission focuses on needs identified by the host nations. However, a number of other nations are supporting the Mercy’s interagency and international team effort. Mercy last was deployed to Southeast Asia in the aftermath of the December 2004 earthquake and tsunami.

For more information on U.S. policies, see East Asia and the Pacific: <http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/>

Pleases Note: Most texts and transcript mentioned in the U.S. Mission Daily Bulletin are available via our homepage: <http://geneva.usmission.gov/>

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